United Nations E/CN.6/2010/NGO/41

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 December 2009
English
Original: French

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1-12 March 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by la Coordination française du lobby européen des femmes, Femmes solidaires and Regards de femmes, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

09-65716 (E) 250110 270110

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Statement

To Ms. Hansa Mehta of India, who succeeded in replacing the wording "rights of man" by "human rights", in the Universal Declaration, in order that all women of the world might have access to fundamental rights.

1. La coordination française du lobby européen des femmes (CLEF), Femmes solidaires and Regards de femmes reaffirm that certain practices, models and religious or traditional constraints limit the recognition of women's full capacity, their rights and the effective achievement of gender equality in terms of rights, duties and dignity.

2. CLEF, Femmes solidaires and Regards de femmes use secularism as a powerful tool for emancipation so that all women and girls living in France, including migrant women, can attain their independence and be protected by republican principles. They work in solidarity with women around the world.

3. These three monitor attacks on the rights and dig[illegible]f women perpetrated in France and all countries of the world under the guise of respect for traditions, customs or religious practices. It is therefore essential to reaffirm that the immediate corollary of freedom of conscience, a fundamental human right, is the neutrality of States with respect to philosophies or personal beliefs. Both these matters must remain private. *Flaunting or imposing them may offend the beliefs of others.*

4. The aforementioned organizations call on all Governments and the States parties to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol) and the Beijing Platform for Action to prohibit outright all forms of humiliation, discrimination or violence against women suffered or "chosen" by women, including in the name of religion or customs. The Millennium Development Goals recall that the problems faced by women are passed on to succeeding generations and must be eradicated. To combat poverty among women, all States should adopt laws on equality in inheritance between women and men and enforce them.

5. The context of the economic and financial crisis should not threaten to set back women's rights but, rather, should provide a window of opportunity. Recovery from the crisis requires the empowerment of women in all areas, including in economic fields, in order to achieve gender parity at all decision-making levels.

6. In order for girls to attain their independence and to be empowered, non-patriarchal education is essential for girls and boys. This will ensure that girls have access to all vocational areas and strengthen the fight against gender-based violence.

Deconstructing patriarchal traditions

7. Patriarchal traditions must disappear. Children's education, for boys and girls, must therefore include not only the transmission of human, cultural and scientific knowledge, but also teach them how to reflect, imagine, create and interact with others, to come to know persons who are different from them.

8. School is the place where children become part of humanity, both through learning and by meeting other people. That is why school must not be beholden to any political or religious ideology. Girls and boys must be taught to live together with mutual respect.

9. This was the reason for the 2004 French law against religious symbols in school, aimed at protecting the girl child and young girls.

10. If the girl child and young girls are seen as a source of disruption and must cover their hair in public places to protect boys, who are deemed incapable of controlling their impulses, this sends a message that is completely at odds with the principle of gender equality.

11. What view are girls and boys supposed to form of the world if their mothers and sisters must hide themselves behind a veil when they go outside? What image do they have of women?

12. In order to combat this degrading image of women, a French parliamentary task force on the wearing of the full veil has been holding meetings since July 2009.

13. CLEF, Femmes solidaires and Regards de femmes have been interviewed and have denounced cultural relativism as racism, since this subtlety is used to bar women from having access to the universal principles of dignity and human rights.

14. Confusion between culture and tradition keeps people apart. Culture is being used to prevent mutual coexistence. Respect for the culture of origin prevents any interaction with anyone who is different by making it a betrayal.

15. The universal refers to something shared by all human beings. It is not the negation of singularity but enables every person to escape from any form of oppression and to embrace the singular in a non-fanatical way. The universal is an empowering reference.

16. It entails thinking about the conditions for harmony, whereas singularities, where imposed as collective or political identities, are exclusive: custom against custom, belief against belief.

17. **Governments should provide programmes to promote equality between girls and boys** throughout the school year at all levels of the educational system. All relevant stakeholders (parents, teachers, careers advisers) should be involved in changing stereotypical images of men and women's social roles, which still influence career choices and boy-girl relationships.

18. To avoid early and unwanted pregnancies, and the transmission of HIV/AIDS, education for equality must include **sex education.**

Professional equality

19. Governments should introduce and support policies for professional equality training and equal access to continuing education, and should take measures to promote the equal sharing of non-remunerated work between women and men. Childcare and dependant care by high-quality professional social services help to create jobs and to reduce unemployment.

20. Governments should establish economic and social policies that promote gender equality, including equal pay and equal pensions. These policies should also combat poverty among women, particularly older women.

21. Governments should adopt mandatory measures for parity in decision-making bodies in the economic and financial sectors, on the executive boards of companies and in elected assemblies.

Combating violence

22. The term "violence", as defined in article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, includes all forms of threats and physical, sexual or psychological harm or harassment.

23. Violence against women is a **fundamental obstacle** to the achievement of gender equality and a **violation of women's human rights. The prerequisite for any effective policy is recognizing that all forms of violence against women are manifestations of patriarchal traditions.**

24. Violence against women is a continuous process, a relentless series of physical, verbal and sexual assaults and acts committed in various ways by men against women with the explicit aim of hurting, humiliating, intimidating and silencing them.

25. Governments should implement a multisectoral and coordinated approach to end violence against women at all levels in order to protect the rights of women everywhere. This approach must include violence prevention measures among men and boys, genuine and effective protection for victims and appropriate care for their recovery.

26. Programmes to combat violence against women must include measures against prostitution and trafficking. States must be guided by the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949), which punishes any person who "exploits the prostitution of another person, **even with the consent of that person**"; and the Palermo Protocol, particularly its article 3 (b), which reads: **"The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation ... shall be irrelevant"** in order to protect prostitutes and to punish clients and procurers.

27. Action plans to combat violence against women and young girls must address **customary violence** that violates human rights, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called honour killings. In order to protect the physical integrity of all women, female genital mutilation must be criminalized. Appropriate care for victims should include clitoral reconstructive surgery provided by the State, in cases where the clitoris has been removed.

Women migrants and displaced women

28. Governments should ensure gender equality in their policies on women migrants. The dignity of the 200 million migrants worldwide must be a priority for all States. Many women migrants have a precarious status in the territories where they live and their fear of being reported to the immigration authorities drives them to accept psychological and physical abuse. These situations are conducive to, even incentives for, sordid trafficking and vigilance is needed to address them.

29. CLEF, Femmes solidaires and Regards de femmes call on Governments and States to provide women migrants and displaced women with access to:

- Personal documents (identity papers: birth certificate, marriage certificate, residence permit, work permit, etc.);
- Adequate housing;
- Equal pay for equal work;
- Initial and continuing education;
- Health services, including sexual and reproductive health;
- A social safety net (with information materials in their language); and,
- Legal assistance.

30. The member associations of Coordination française du lobby européen des femmes, Femmes solidaires and Regards de femmes are tirelessly pursuing their efforts in all areas of women's rights to ensure that empowerment, independence and gender equality in rights, duties and dignity are not only an ideal, but are effectively achieved.